



Background to Community Colleges Australia

Community Colleges Australia (CCA) is a member-funded peak body. It was formed in late 2006, recognising a need for an industry association at a national level to represent not-for-profit (NFP) community owned providers of adult and youth education, training and learning in a local environment. It currently has 65 members representing over 60% of the VET delivery by NFP providers on the eastern seaboard of Australia. CCA's strategy is to have members from all states and territories within the next 3-5 years.

Membership comprises long established learning organisations located in metropolitan, regional and rural locations. The 'community colleges' are strategically placed to provide a focus on student welfare with commitment to the employment outcomes for, and personal development of, the individual.

CCA is committed to assisting our members grow their business and thereby to enhance the learning opportunities for all Australians through all stages of their adult lives. CCA promotes 'real education for today's Australians' by delivery that engages and belongs to local communities.

Our vision is for Australia to achieve more dynamic and vibrant communities, informed and empowered through learning.

Introduction

CCA members are Adult and Community Education providers in NSW and Victoria they have a collective annual turnover of \$250million and deliver 6-7 million accredited training hours annually. CCA therefore not only welcomes this opportunity to provide input into the NVEAC Blue Print for Change, but also considers it vital that the unique perspective of the Community Colleges be included in future negotiation with Government.

CCA is willing to assist NVEAC further during its deliberations and preparation of its final report and looks forward to introducing Jennifer Gibb to our sector at the CCA Conference in late September.

Community Education providers have widely been acknowledged as a vital bridging point between the Government Social Inclusion agenda and workforce development Agenda.

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Community Colleges have been highly successful in supporting non-traditional learners, particularly cohorts that include:

- Youth at risk
- Young people who have left school not completing Year 10
- People with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- People with a disability
- Disadvantaged women
- Unemployed (long and short term)
- Older isolated adults (particularly living in public housing)
- Homeless
- People recovering from drug dependency¹.

Research shows that a student’s ability to learn is most affected by the need to be in a place where they feel comfortable and have the support they need around them (non-institutional).

ACE provides non-institutional alternative methods of learning and education.

Barriers to Learning Participation

Hillage and Aston (2001) classified the barriers to learning participation of non-traditional learners into three groups:

Attitudinal	Material	Structural
Negative attitudes to learning, costs of learning (fees, transport, books, equipment, and childcare), lack of confidence or motivation, lack of appropriate education or training opportunities.	Financial constraints, time constraints, lack of information, geographic isolation, and lack of basic skills.	No programs offered locally or access issues, fear of losing welfare benefits in doing too much training.

The goal of Community Colleges to minimise the impact of all three these group on our most vulnerable students.

1. The Blue Print for change - systemic areas of reform

Currently much energy expended by under resourced college managers in seeking short- term projects funds to support our most disadvantaged learners; the current system is fragmented and often contradictory. It is ironic that seeking support for our most disadvantaged society members is the most complex.

We need a simplified system that aims to unite government departments to support each other in achieving results. Funding programs need to long term in nature recognizing that sustainable solutions are not a “quick fix”

VET reform for disadvantaged learners requires a whole of government approach, that offers long term funding programs providing more consistency for tutors and prospective learners, and providing greater coordination between government agencies, recognizing that for an Education and Employment change to occur for disadvantaged students in VET, related change needs to happen in all areas of the student’s life.

Departments such as Health, Mental health, Aboriginal affairs, Housing, transport, Family and Community, Disability, all contribute to the continued engagement of a disadvantaged student in gaining success in VET

2. The Compelling case for change

More than good will is required to make a significant difference in equity with in VET. As mentioned in the NVEAC paper, we advocate for a streamlined approach with implementation, good practice with some groups needs time to be embedded.

Determination of the true cost of delivery to Equity groups is a key factor. Disadvantaged students may require- longer hours for same outcomes, more 1 on 1 teaching, more wrap around services such as assistance with housing, families, transport, drugs, work ethics. As long as the real cost of service not being met, services to disadvantaged students will continue to diminish or be delivered with compromised levels of support.

3. The Policy Platform

In this time of reform across many departments of government, there is a real need to coordinate services. There are an increasing number of organisations and departments being involved in the VET area. While this may be seen as a positive step it can become overwhelming for small providers as they explore audit, compliance and funding issues in order to maximize opportunities for disadvantaged learners.

Current Policy and practice is fragmented, and confusing, not only for the student, but also the providers.

We also have a concern that price, rather than quality is increasingly the primary factor in successful tenders. Maybe research into the true cost of delivery for Equity student may support change in this area.

4. Diversity of the VET SECTOR

It is vital to note that unlike other states "ACE" in NSW and Victoria contributes significant SCH to the VET System and is considered a strong proponent of the VET Sector.

Community College members contribute 191967 vocation and pre vocational enrolments in 2009 and 106562 personal development enrolments. In NSW our colleges contribute 6,096, 339 SCH, 2.8% of the NSW SCH total. Community College members deliver qualifications in VET spanning CGEA and Cert 1 through to Advanced Diplomas. (Please see excel document of summary of Scopes of registration for Community College members in NSW).

The VET Sector is in a state of flux at the present time with Schools, Enterprise RTO's and Universities entering the realm traditional held by TAFE and ACE.

This may be advantageous for equity students as it opens up opportunities to engage in the environment that they feel is most convenient and support of their needs. Community Colleges are currently doing some fantastic work with youth who have been disadvantaged by the school system, but feel the more casual nature of the community College learning environment better suits their needs.

A great strength of the ACE sector in VET is that is nimble and flexible enough to offer programs that support the needs of the disadvantaged learner, rather than the needs of the provider.

5. Adult and Community Education

The Adult and Community education sector plays a vital role in the training of Equity groups in the VET Sector. Goal three of the Ministerial Declaration on ACE identifies that the need to "extend the participation of individuals in vocationally focussed courses in ACE", and a key related strategy is to develop an action plan to increase participation in ACE by socially excluded group, we wholly support such a strategy, but note that an action plan without sufficient funds to execute the plan is worthless.

Increased obligations in terms of not only compliance with AQTF, AVETMISS, but also compliance requirements facing all SMEs (Work Cover, IR etc) means that ACE Colleges are facing greater staffing costs than ever, at a time that funding is not increasing at an equivalent rate.

6. Embedding and Good Practice

Community Colleges have always continued to support best practice in student services and delivery despite increasing costs.

Community Colleges have long recognised the need for holistic, wrap around support in an effort to support disadvantaged learners. This is more than just transport and accommodation - it is helping with work culture practices, drug assistance, family help, and providing a safe and supportive environment in which to learn.

7. Areas of Reform

Reform Area 1 - Sustainable Investment

Sustainable investment is vital to engaging and supporting Equity students in VET. Our colleges have identified that to provide equal service and get significant results for Equity students takes a significantly greater investment than a mainstream student. The mandate of our colleges is to support the needs of their individual community; hence colleges are committed to making this investment.

It is vital that future funding represents the real cost of delivery to support equity students, but also is long term to support professional development and infrastructure.

To be sustainable funding also needs to be negotiated and coordinated with other government departments to ensure that one does not cancel out the benefits, or duplicate another.

Supporting equity students requires additional funding not only in additional teaching contact hours, but also in some of the following:

1. Additional support workers, carers, translators
2. Assistive technologies
3. Catering
4. Child Care
5. Transport
6. Learning texts, and adapted texts
7. Counseling (Educational, Career and Pastoral)

These issues need to be considered in future funding models to support colleges best meet the need of Equity students. There also needs to be some consideration that the needs of equity student are unique and complex, hence support needs to be learner focused.

Funding for programs to support equity students needs to be long term rather than short term in order to maximize the students' opportunity of success.

This is notable not only in direct VET funding but also in programs that our members deliver which directly correlate to a student's ability to undertake VET e.g. AMEP, LLNP etc. Whilst funding bodies will desire quality outcomes, if student contact hour fees for such programs do not at least cover the organisation's operational costs for delivering these programs, it is questionable as to why an independent locally owned ACE organisation would continue to participate in these critical learning programs. Yet, the ethos and form of learning community colleges offer, often lends them to being the most appropriate deliverer of these types of pre-VET formal training.

7.1.3 Contestable funding

We welcome an investigation into the issue of contestability and its impact for disadvantaged learners. This issue is of importance in all states, but particularly in Victoria in light of new contestable funding arrangements.

A concern expressed by many of our providers relates to the COAG agenda for funding based on Completion rates. We have grave concerns for Equity students who may gain significant benefits due to just their participation.

7.1.4 Funding for Assistive Technologies

Funding for assistive technology is vital for working with equity groups in the community education setting. This is particularly prevalent when delivering programs for students with a disability. In 2009 many of our members updated Disability Action Plans in line with HEROC standards. One of the clear risk factor identified was the lack of funds to purchase appropriate technologies to support students with disabilities. The challenge of providing appropriate infrastructure is increasingly challenging for ACE providers as current funding only just covers the cost of delivery. Unlike TAFE, Community Colleges do not receive any additional funding for support for students with a disability

If there is to be a case for funds for assistive technology, it also needs to be underpinned with professional development for trainers and support workers to enable them to make the most effective use of technology with students. Without such professional development, technology can't be efficiently and effectively utilized.

In addition to funding for assistive technology, it is also vital to consider funding for assistive services. The cost of an Auslan interpreter is highly restrictive for an ACE provider, yet vital for a deaf or hearing-impaired student. A recent example of the cost of interpreter services for a 2 day program was \$3900 for a single student. The cost of which must be borne by the training provider.

Similarly the cost of Braille translations of course material can be prohibitive, yet vital for the vision-impaired student to participate in training.

Reform Area 2 - Measuring and reporting performance

While the capturing and reporting of information is vital, and we support the notion of the unique student identifier we concur that careful management of student confidentiality is crucial. Also any tracking system throughout a student's career must ensure that a student is not disadvantaged due to a prior equity issue. We have recently had a report of a student being rejected from a funded VET program because of a reported mental health issue 10 years prior. It is vital to recognise disadvantage is not a permanent state of being.

Any reform to reporting and measurement systems including reporting to the AVETMISS collection, implementation of student identifier, changes to the AQTF or implementation of the My Skills website come at an additional administrative cost to colleges who are, already over burdened by the cost of compliance.

While the "My Skills" website is potentially a great marketing tool, and an excellent opportunity for the public we would like more information and input into the content.

Community Colleges would be very willing to take part in performance-based funding such as the Quality Skills incentive program- sometimes just piloting schemes with large providers will not always give good evidence for social inclusion, these groups of disadvantaged users might not want to be involved with large RTOs.

The quality assessment regime for all RTOs has become very bureaucratic. Whilst CCA is fully accepting of ensuring VET education is delivered at the highest possible quality standards, the increase in audits by a plethora of different government departments does not necessarily indicate an improvement in quality assurance. It is however, placing a burden on managers of NFP entities. Performance indicators should support the direction of where the college is aiming; however this is not currently occurring. Streamlining compliance and audit requirements would provide an opportunity for VET professional managers to spend more time on other aspects of their business e.g. ensuring quality delivery of training by their VET practitioners, managing the welfare of their students and seeking grant funding.

Reform Area 3 - Building the capacity of the VET Workforce

Community Colleges Australia has contributed to the Productivity Commissions study on the VET workforce and we are happy to share that submission.

We would like to emphasise the need for ongoing, targeted professional development for both training staff, administrative, managerial staff, particularly in the area of Equity students. The removal of "Reframing the Future" has left a big hole in the area of quality Professional Development. The strength of a program such as Reframing the Future was that providers had the ability to apply for a project that was specific to their needs, but the results of the projects were broadly shared giving colleges the opportunity to gain value from professional development projects other than their own.

Reform Area 4 - Embedding support for foundation skills development

We concur the definition of foundation skills is challenging and look forward to some clear guidance in the future. We maintain that there is a difference between foundation skills and LLN skills, both of which require attention if we are to achieve the COAG goal of halving the number of those without a Certificate III by 2020.

With an increase emphasis also on completion results as opposed to enrolments, providers may also be faced with the need to screen students to select those with the best chance of success, rather than those with the greatest need to participate, particularly if future funding is linked to successful completions.

We concur with the reported concern about the frustration of funding being capped and short term, our colleges know that delivery foundation skills to equity students requires persistence, and a long term commitment, not short term funding.

We also support the inclusion of funding of “skill sets” rather than just full qualifications, we constantly receive feedback from employers and student that they require “Just in time” customised training to meet industry needs.

CCA keen to assist NVEAC with trialing and evaluating innovative models that we are currently operating in delivering, and planning in the area of foundation skills. The Lifeworks program (See attached), for example, is an innovative training model that offers a new way of working with Equity students.

“We can’t throw old-fashioned vocational education and training at those who are disengaged from learning and from their families and communities” Dianne Kitcher CEO Central West Community College

Reform Area 5 - Pathways and Partnership to achieve positive learning, life and work outcomes for learners

Community College Australia Members are committed to implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on ACE. Goal 1 and the accompanying strategies are a strong focus of this initiative.

“promote the significant role played by the ACE sector in developing pathways to further training “

“facilitate auspicing and partnership arrangements which increase access by individuals to vocationally focussed training”

In this regard we are currently engaged in our “Stepping Stones” research project which is looking at the role our colleges play in engaging students in leisure or prevocational courses, and moving them through to higher level qualifications. We are happy to share the results of this project when complete.

We share the concerns about focus on higher qualification and the impact this is having on bridging and pre vocational pathways. The current funding programs (SSP, PPP) are forcing VET / ACE providers to target training at the higher certificate levels in order to be eligible for funding opportunities. Increasingly ACE colleges have been forced to move away from their traditional pre vocational /lower certificate level training in order to follow the \$\$, currently more ACE colleges than ever are delivering Diploma, Advanced Diploma qualifications which in rural and remote areas, can be challenging in terms of recruiting specialist trainers. Students are not able to achieve in these higher level qualifications, if they do not have the Literacy and Foundation skills to underpin the training.

If ACE is not receiving funding to be able to offer training in foundation and lower certificate levels, and TAFE are moving in to Higher Qualifications - where will the Equity students go? This has always been the strong domain of the ACE sector, but in a financially strapped sector, providers have to follow the funding in order to survive.

The position of ACE Community Colleges as community owned and managed, places them in a unique position as a connection point with in their communities. Developing partnerships between School, employers, JSA providers and other training providers is a valued, yet unrecognised function provided by most Community Colleges.

We are well placed to deliver several Levels of partnerships and pathways:

Internal to provider pathways from one to another linked program

Joint provider programs:

(Dual recognition) courses - e.g. VET in Schools//LLN in VET (Linked skills Program)

(Concurrent) courses not formally connected

(Single) course- (integrated) ACE other provider (teaching)

Provider to provider learning programs

Community Colleges, particularly in regional areas, are also often in a position of linking community services, hence matching the “whole of Life Wrap around model” as expressed in the reforms.

An innovative example of pathways by one of our member colleges is demonstrated in the WEA Hunter ALESCO Program, where by the Community College has set up a private school with in the College. Students follow regular Board of Studies curriculum, but in an Adult Learning environment, with obvious links to VET as required. Currently there are 4 ALESCO schools set up within colleges, with 2 more approved for 2011.

Community Colleges are well placed to work with their local small businesses to provide work experience etc and to help longer term with work transition.

Reform Area 6 - Listening to the voice of the learner when designing the VET System

Community Colleges have recognised the necessity of embedding Individualised learning plans and career counselling into training opportunities for all students. This customised service will have a significant impact in Equity students, but will need to be resourced effectively before implementation can occur.

Individual learning plans and interviews are already mandatory in such programs as AMEP, and providers have often reported that there is no compensation to the provider for these consultations, which, though vital, can often take several hours in face to face time, and generally result in lengthy follow up situations. Our colleges see this as a vital part of their service to the client, and recognise that it will ultimately result in a better outcome for the student, but concerns are raised about the future resourcing of this service. We recommend that the cost of Individual learning plans and career counselling be factored into the real of cost of delivery to equity clients.

8. Better Coordination of policy between levels of Government

CCA would be pleased to work with NVEAC on a range of effective models for learning dissemination and we would be happy to discuss this further in forums or one-on-one meetings with the staff of NVEAC.

In conclusion, we look forward to further discussion on Equity Issues in VET, we believe our member colleges have a lot to contribute as they continue to develop opportunities for engaging all levels of our community